



ISAIAH 58

RITUAL AND CEREMONY IS NOT ENOUGH ~ WORSHIP GOD IN TRUTH

Chapter 58 is part of the second major section of Isaiah and deals less with Judah’s immediate plight than with its future deliverance from Babylonian exile and ultimate glory.

Isaiah takes to task those who go through the motions of religious observance while at the same time committing sins and promoting corruption. The kind of worship pleasing to God includes a desire to live an upright life and to help the poor and oppressed. It also means setting aside the Sabbath as a time to worship God and delight in Him rather than to pursue worldly pleasures.

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 58:1 “Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. ² Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. ³ ‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. ⁴ Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD?”</p>	<p>a 58:3 See Lev. 16:29. It was clear that their fasting was an attempt to appear spiritual and manipulate God.</p> <p>b 58:5 Or “to bow your heads like (bent over) reeds.”</p> <p>c 58:5 Or “That is a day acceptable to Yahweh.</p>	<p>Ritual and Ceremony Is Not Enough</p> <p>Isaiah 58:1 Shout it loud and clear! Don’t hold back! Let your voice be like a trumpet blast! Declare to my people their rebellion and to Jacob’s tribes their sin! ² Yes, daily they seem to seek me, pretending that they delight to know my ways, as though they were a nation that does what is right and had not rejected the law of their God. They ask me to show them the right way, acting as though they are eager to be close to me. ³ They say, ‘Why is it that when we fasted, you did not see it? We starved ourselves, and you didn’t seem to notice.’ “Because on the day you fasted you were seeking only your own desires, and you continue to exploit your workers. a ⁴ During your fasts, you quarrel and fight with others and strike them with an angry fist. When you fast like that, your voice will not be heard on high. ⁵ Do you think I’m impressed with that kind of fast? Is it just a day to starve your bodies, make others think you’re humble, b and lie down in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a “fast? Do you think I, Yahweh, will be pleased with that? c</p>

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Translation (TPT)	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>⁶ “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. ¹¹ And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. ¹² And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.</p> <p>¹³ “If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; ¹⁴ then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”</p>	<p>d 58:6 Or “Loose the ropes of the yoke.”</p> <p>e 58:8 Showing justice will bring the light of a new day. This sunrise pictures God’s restored favor and blessing coming upon the people.</p> <p>f 58:8 Or “health” or “restoration.” This would include the body, soul, and spirit.</p> <p>g 58:8 Or “sprout speedily, grow.”</p> <p>h 58:8 Or “will be your rear guard”; that is, God’s glory covers us from our past and protects us today and forever, with glory going before us and following after as well.</p> <p>i 58:9 Or “extending the finger.”</p> <p>j 58:10 Jesus offered himself to us, so we should offer ourselves in compassion for others. See Matt. 10:8; Acts 20:33–35; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14.</p> <p>k 58:10 The five qualifications of last-days ministry are found in vv. 9–10: (1) Commit to banish every form of oppression in our lives, churches, and society. (2) “Remove scornful accusation (criticism) of others and their ministries. (3) Forbid to spread malicious slander. (4) Have compassion for the poor and disenfranchised. (5) Comfort those enduring suffering and tragedy. Then God promises (vv. 10–12) that multiple blessings will come: (1) Our spiritual light (influence) will increase in our communities. (2) Discouragement and gloom will disappear from our lives. (3) God will give us specific guidance and counsel to know what to do and where to go. (4) He will fill us with renewing grace, even when we are surrounded by difficult situations. (5) Our spiritual lives will flourish like a lush garden with fruit and beauty. (6) We will not cease to be an ever-flowing source of blessing to others. (7) We will be given God’s grace to rebuild lives and institutions in our cities, churches, and nations. (8) We will take up the legacy of our spiritual fathers and build on their foundations. (9) We will have a testimony of healing cities. (10) We will restore well-being to our communities.</p> <p>l 58:10 Or “double light.”</p> <p>m 58:12 Or “on foundations of many generations.”</p> <p>n 58:12 Or “repairers of the gap.”</p> <p>o “58:12 Or “restorers of paths that lead you home.” This is the Elijah ministry of restoration. See Neh. 1–4; Acts 3:21.</p> <p>p 58:14 That is, God will raise you up and cause you to prosper greatly. See Deut. 32:13; Eph. 1:3; 2:6.</p>	<p>Worship God in Truth</p> <p>⁶ “This is the kind of fast that I desire: Remove the heavy chains of oppression! Stop exploiting your workers! d Set free the crushed and mistreated! “Break off every yoke of bondage! ⁷ Share your food with the hungry! Provide for the homeless and bring them into your home Clothe the naked! Don’t turn your back on your own flesh and blood ⁸ Then my favor will bathe you in sunlight until you are like the dawn bursting through a dark night. e And then suddenly your healing f will manifest. g You will see your righteousness march out before you, and the glory of Yahweh will protect you from all harm! h ⁹ Then Yahweh will answer you when you pray. When you cry out for help, he will say, ‘I am here.’ “If you banish every form of oppression, the scornful accusations, i and vicious slander, ¹⁰ and if you offer yourselves in compassion j for the hungry and relieve those in misery, k then your dawning light will rise in the darkness and your gloom will turn into noonday splendor. l ¹¹ Yahweh will always guide you where to go and what to do. He will fill you with refreshment even when you are in a dry, difficult place. He will continually restore strength to you, so you will flourish like a well-watered garden and like an ever-flowing, trustworthy trustworthy spring of blessing. ¹² Your people will rebuild long-deserted ruins, building anew on foundations laid long before you. m You will be known as Repairers of the Cities n and Restorers of Communities. o</p> <p>¹³ “If you stop pursuing your own desires on my holy day, and refrain from disregarding the Sabbath, if you call the Sabbath a delightful pleasure and Yahweh’s holy day honorable, if you honor it properly by not chasing your own desires, serving your own interests, and speaking empty words, ¹⁴ then you will find the joyous bliss that comes from serving Yahweh. And I will cause you to prosper and be carried triumphantly over the high places of the land. p You will enjoy the heritage of Jacob, your ancestor.” Certainly the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it!”</p>

Bible Knowledge Commentary

JOHN A. MARTIN

- THE RESTORATION TO COME BY GOD'S INITIATIVE (CHAPS. 58-60)

- **Obedience required** (chap. 58)

- **The reminder of the people's sins.**

- **58:1-2.** God called for heralds to go about telling the nation of their rebellion (see comments on 1:2; also cf. 1:5; 53:5, 8; 59:13) and sins. Like a trumpet used to get people's attention, the heralds were to shout. Outwardly the people seemed eager to want to know God and for God to be near them.

- **The Concern of the People.**

- **58:3a.** The people voiced their concern that they were in difficulty though they seemed to be doing what the Law required. They fasted and humbled themselves, but they feared that God had not seen it or noticed. Apparently they thought that by going through the "motions" of religion (without any inward reality of faith) they would be blessed.

- **The Response of the Lord**

- **58:3b-14.** The Lord responded by pointing out that He was more interested in their obedience than their rituals. Unfortunately they, like many people, had confused rituals with relationship, outward acts with true obedience.
- **58:3b-5.** Their fasts did not alter their poor relationship with others. They were disregarding other peoples' needs by exploiting their employees (cf. Deut. 24:14-15; James 5:1-6) and by quarreling and fighting. Therefore their prayers would not be heard, for their kind of fasting was not what the Lord accepted. Their hearts, not just their heads, needed to bow before the LORD.
- **58:6-7.** Fasting was to encourage a person to respond positively to God's commands. In the Old Testament only one fast was commanded—the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31). Only after the fall of Jerusalem were fast days instituted (Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19). Ironically on the other hand many specific commands were not being followed. So the Lord reminded the people that they should be just (Isa. 58:6) and openhanded with those in need—the hungry (cf. v. 10), the poor ... the naked (v. 7). The Israelites were to consider themselves members of one family who at one time had been slaves in Egypt. Therefore they were not to neglect each other. When someone shared with one in need, it was a reminder that everything he owned belonged to the Lord.
- **58:8-12.** If the people had inner righteousness (revealed in outward acts of justice and mercy, vv. 6-7), then ... the LORD would bless them (cf. Deut. 28:1-14) with light (often a picture of blessing; cf. Isa. 58:10), healing (spiritual restoration), righteousness (high standards), protection from trouble, and answered prayer (vv. 8-9a). If they would do away with ... oppression and gossip and would help others in need (cf. v. 7), then the Lord would bless them (give them light; cf. v. 8). He would give guidance, satisfaction, strength, fertility (like a spring), and physical restoration (rebuilding the ruins).
- **58:13-14.** Sabbath observance was a barometer of one's faithfulness to the [Vol. 1, p. 1114] Mosaic Covenant (cf. comments on 56:4-6). By following the rules for the Sabbath a person acknowledged the importance of worshiping God and showed that he depended on God to bless him materially for

that time he took off from work. By putting God first and not seeking to do as he wished, a person would have joy, not only in spiritual salvation (ride on the heights) but also in prosperity (feast on the inheritance). All this was certain because the LORD has spoken (cf. 1:20; 40:5).

TONIGHT'S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. We have been studying the book of Isaiah since November 12, 2018, for 20 months! In that time, we have never run across a chapter that is as applicable to our lives as Isaiah 58. Personalize verse three a bit. Read it again and recount a time when you felt like you had been obedient to do all the thing required to get God to move on your behalf, but it didn't happen. Why do you think you may not have gotten what *you* were asking for?
2. In verses 4-14, God seems to be more interested in his people's obedience than their rituals:
 - What are the **rituals** that we "woke" believers in 2020 tend to fall into?
 - What was the last thing you absolutely knew God was calling you to be **obedient** to?
3. Give a brief description of why you think God calls people to fast. What is the goal of biblical fasting?
4. It almost looks like God is saying that fasting is not really about going without food for a period of time. What did Jesus say about fasting?
5. Why is it that we link prayer and fasting together? What are we after when we enter into a time of prayer and fasting? Let's say we do a three-day fast and pray for our nation. What are we after?
6. How has this conversation tonight changed your personal view on what it is that the Lord is after when it comes to fasting?